

\61\iwakuni  
February 21, 1998

IWAKUNI

[In the course of taking part in the CINCPAC study of command facilities, communications and nuclear weapons plans and operations in the Pacific in 1959 and 1960 and my work in Washington in 1960 and 1961 with Air Staff and Joint Staff planners, I came to know as much as any American, civilian or military, about the system of targeting and controlling weapons for general nuclear war and also about the actual targets and the structure of the plans.

I had spent the summers of 1958 and 1959 working conceptually on the strategic parts of the plan at RAND in company with Albert Wohlstetter, Harry Rowen, Herman Kahn, Andy Marshall, Fred Hoffman and others. RAND's studies dealt almost entirely with the plans and operations of SAC [the Strategic Air Command, built up under General LeMay, which had primary responsibility for achieving US objectives in general war]. They had to do with the use of the B-52 force, based mainly in the US, and the B-47s with bases in the US and abroad, plus a smaller number of intermediate range missiles based in England, Italy and Turkey, along with ICBMs soon to be based in the US. These were all under the command of SAC. As Polaris missiles [later, Poseidon and Trident] on nuclear submarines came into the forces after 1960 [check date] their targeting and operations were integrated into strategic planning at SAC Headquarters in Omaha, though the submarines were under Navy command.

By 1961 there were about 600 B-52s and 1400 B-47s available for general war against the Sino-Soviet Bloc, along with a couple of hundred missile warheads on ICBMs, IRBMs [intermediate range missiles, Thor and Jupiter] and SLBMs [submarine-launched ballistic missiles, Polaris and later Poseidon and Trident]. But at the same time there were roughly a thousand short-range tactical aircraft controlled by the Navy and Air Force outside SAC that were within range of the Sino-Soviet Bloc on carriers and overseas Navy and Air Force bases and could deliver nuclear weapons.

The primary function of these forces was non-nuclear operations in limited wars, as in Korea. But they had the secondary mission of hitting nuclear targets in general war. For many of them, this secondary mission got very high priority in their training, alert status and planning. Yet SAC planners (and RAND analysts) paid very little attention to the capabilities or planned operations of these forces, which were not under SAC operational control. In developing SAC force requirements and in assigning vehicles and weapons to targets, both SAC planners and RAND analysts acted as if these forces didn't exist. I believe that SAC actually made very little effort to know what their plans, deployment and precise capabilities were, let alone to integrate



them with SAC's.

One rationale for this was that during a limited war these forces would be mainly occupied with non-nuclear operations in one theater or another and they wouldn't be quickly available if a general war crisis arose. (It was assumed that general war was most likely to arise out of an ongoing limited war, rather than as a bolt from the blue). But beyond that, there was a considerable amount of condescension in SAC about these theater tactical forces. Since SAC didn't control their training and operations, SAC commanders and planners couldn't vouch for their competence and reliability, and didn't want to depend on it. The range of these tactical planes, which lacked aerial refueling capability, was much shorter than that of SAC's heavy bombers with their tankers, so at most they could cover only peripheral targets in the Bloc, not the urban-industrial targets and airbases in the heart of Russia that SAC regarded as most important. And they could carry only one nuclear weapon each, of limited yield, not the multiple heavy weapons that a B-52 or a B-47 could deliver.

Finally, these tactical airplanes were mostly on bases close to enemy territory, subject to short-range attack by Communist forces. Most were neither on quick alert nor soon ready for nuclear operations. In case of a surprise attack or a war preceded by short warning, most of these planes would not survive. How long the carriers might be undiscovered and survive in a nuclear war was a very controversial matter between the Navy and Air Force, but on short notice they were not likely to be in position for preplanned nuclear targets, perhaps for many hours or days.

Thus, though the tactical theater nuclear forces were half as large as SAC's in numbers of planes, they could at most deliver a very much smaller proportion of the number of weapons, still less in megatonnage of yield, and even less when it came to reliable launch and delivery. Thus SAC's tendency to ignore them entirely. But the attitude in the theater commands toward their nuclear mission was entirely different. In the absence of an ongoing limited war, CINCPAC, and no doubt other theater commanders, saw preparation for the possible general war mission as having a transcendent importance (as if, in turn, SAC didn't exist).

And there was reason for this. By the end of the Fifties, the single nuclear weapon carried by a one- or two-man fighter-bomber was a thermonuclear weapon, often a Mark 28 weapon with a yield of 1.1 megatons, equivalent to more than one million tons of high explosives, or half the tonnage of all the bombs dropped by the US in World War II. SAC, with its thousands of still-higher yield weapons, might not take seriously the role of one of these, or even scores or hundreds of them, but an enemy would, and CINCPAC had to.

The CINCPAC plan for general war was known as the GEOP, the



General Emergency Operations Plan. A number of the bases scheduled to deliver nuclear weapons in the event of general war were in Japan. But US plans for using these bases collided with a central Japanese policy which renounced and forbade the development, possession, or introduction of nuclear weapons in Japan. A legacy of Hiroshima was what US planners called Japan's nuclear "allergy."

-----  
 In early 1960 I learned that one small Marine air base in Japan at Iwakuni had an arrangement whereby the handful of planes on it with general war missions would get their nuclear weapons very quickly in the event of a general war alert. In contrast to all the other planes on Japanese bases, the Marines at Iwakuni would have nuclear weapons within minutes instead of hours. Because of the special relation of the Marines to the Navy, there was an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) anchored just offshore Iwakuni with nuclear weapons aboard, loaded onto amphibious tractors, just for the small group of planes on this base.

This LST, the U.S.S. San Joaquin County, had a cover mission as an electronics repair ship. It was permanently stationed not just in the three-mile limit of Japanese territorial waters but anchored a couple of hundred yards from the beach, in the tidal waters. By any standards it was stationed within the territory of Japan. And so were its nuclear weapons.

In any kind of nuclear emergency the San Joaquin County would operate as it was designed to do in an amphibious landing. It would haul anchor and come straight ashore. The front of the ship would open up like a clamshell and amphibious tractors loaded with nuclear weapons would come down a ramp into the water or directly onto the beach, then head on land straight to the airstrip where the weapons would be loaded onto the Marine planes.

Thus this handful of planes would have nuclear weapons some 6 to 10 hours in advance of the other hundreds of Air Force planes on bases in Japan. If they made use of this and launched on their missions immediately, they would be among the very first planes in the world, along with planes on Korea, to release bombs on Communist targets. Since they were so few and their targets so peripheral, the main effect of this would be to alert Communist forces worldwide of the onset of general war, if they had not launched first. But presumably in most cases the Marine planes would be held back to be launched with other forces, so that the effect of their having weapons sooner would be imperceptible.

But the effect of the Japanese discovering the permanent presence of these weapons would be very perceptible indeed. It might well blow the US out of Japan. If the Japanese government should become aware of the situation, and more particularly if the



political opposition became aware of it, the US was likely to lose all its bases in Japan. There could be even be a total rupture of diplomatic relations between the US and Japan, which might possibly shift toward the Chinese.

So it was regarded as a super-secret from the Japanese and was relatively little-known even among US Air Force and Navy planners. Yet the arrangement was apparently fairly well known at the base itself, and the landing of the tractors and bombs was a maneuver that the LST was said rehearse occasionally. What was known to the pilots, the tractor crews and the crew of the LST at the base was potentially knowable to some fraction of their girlfriends in the region. In fact, the planners to whom I spoke about this, at 7th Fleet, in Japan and back in Hawaii, tended to assume that Communist spies must already know of the situation and were waiting for the time and the right way to reveal it to biggest effect.

RAND studies of possibilities of sabotage suggested to me what that way could be. It would be no trick for Communist frogmen, Japanese or others, to swim out to that ship and plant limpet mines on the side of it. An explosion on what purported to be an electronics repair ship would at the least raise public questions about its nature and official investigation which could quickly reveal its cargo of nuclear weapons. If the saboteurs were lucky and used a big enough mine, they could even detonate the high explosive on one or more of the nuclear weapons aboard, scattering radioactive material in the Iwakuni region (which happened to be not far from Hiroshima), or even conceivably cause a partial nuclear explosion. In fact, to think big, the mine itself could be nuclear. There would be no way of telling, in any of these cases, that the explosion had been caused by outsiders as opposed to an accidental explosion of American weapons stationed aboard the ship. [The actual cause of the explosion that destroyed the battleship Maine in Havana harbor, propelling the US into war one hundred years ago this month, remains unknown to this day!]

The stationing of these weapons in Japanese tidal waters, to no tangible benefit whatever, was one of the most irresponsible actions it was possible to imagine. So it seemed to all the nuclear planners who were in on the secret. But they didn't know what to do about it, since they presumed it had been accepted by CINCPAC, a Navy admiral. Did any civilian authorities, or military commands higher than CINCPAC, know about it? These officers didn't know, and they could try to find out or alert higher levels bypassing intermediate levels of command and CINCPAC only at great risk to their own careers.

That may be why someone told me about it in the first place, and why others told me their concern about it. As a RAND consultant, someone not permanently wired into their chain of command, I could alert higher levels or other agencies without paying the same price they would have had to. But they could



justify telling me because of the general instructions they had gotten that they could tell me anything, for purposes of our research.<sup>1</sup>

I wasn't sure what to do with the information either, since I didn't then have contacts in the Office of Secretary of Defense, the State Department or the White House. I told high officials at RAND about it, and they in turn, I was told, passed it on to a general in Air Force plans. Richard Goldstein, a RAND vice president, brought the word back to me that Air Force officers agreed that this was an extremely serious situation but it wasn't easy for them to do anything about it because it was a Navy matter. For many years there had a working alliance between the Navy and the Air Force to emphasize the importance to the US of nuclear weapons, which worked to the budgetary disadvantage of the Army. It would be a delicate matter, threatening this alliance, for the Air Force to raise questions about where and how the Navy was storing its nuclear weapons. It wasn't prudent for the Air Force to make waves for the Navy, so to speak.

In 1960, I didn't know what I could do further. But in the new administration in 1961, Paul Nitze, as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, was in charge both of policy planning in the Pentagon and military liaison with foreign countries, including base rights. I told his deputy, Harry Rowen, about the situation, who asked me to put it all in writing for Nitze and to do the typing myself for special security. This was in April, 1961, just after I had drafted for Nitze and McNamara what became the Secretary of Defense Guidance to the JCS on nuclear war planning.

I typed out a memo and stamped it "Top Secret--Eyes Only for Paul Nitze." ("Eyes Only" was not a classification but a designation indicating that this was not for routine distribution within an agency or office and was not to be copied or shown to anyone other than the specific addressees listed in the heading; it was "for their eyes only.")

I wrote in detail all that I knew and how I had come to know it about the role of the San Joaquin County. I also gave a fairly exhaustive analysis of the pros and cons, since anyone first hearing of such an anomaly would tend to assume that there must be some highly technical reason justifying it. I reported that to the officers in the theater aware of it, it was evident that there was no strategic or technical rationale at all, no tangible military advantage counterbalancing the obvious diplomatic risks.

The reason why these Marine planes alone were provided such ready access to nuclear weapons was simply that their landing strip was near the beach and the Navy was able and willing to provide them secretly an LST close by. Presumably the Air Force wasn't tempted to do something similar for its own planes, because it



wasn't practical to keep, say, a KC-97 tanker loaded with nuclear weapons flying continuously above an Air Force base in Japan.

It wasn't even as though a large number of Navy bases were benefitted by this, so that it would affect a sizeable part of the forces in Japan or the theater. This violation of the treaty affected only a handful of weapons at one base. Yet the risk was virtually the same as if it had been a lot of bases.

Nitze had my memo "staffed out." He assigned his assistant Timothy Stanley to investigate the problem, and Stanley had me rewrite my report for other staffers. Eventually I was shown various reports that came out of this.<sup>2</sup> All the facts that I had presented were confirmed. But it was also corroborated by the foreign affairs specialists within ISA that this was a clearcut violation of both letter and spirit of our security treaty with Japan.

This was contrasted with marginal cases like the carrier visits and even the possibility of our emergency alert plans being executed. This was a permanent installation, and it couldn't even be said to be "in the waters, not on the territory" since the ship was so close in that it would be regarded by every legal test as being on the territory of Japan. They corroborated the extreme diplomatic risks that this involved, and concluded that it was highly urgent to correct this situation immediately.

But there was a new piece of information. One of these staffers reported that on first investigating the situation he went to the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Atomic Weapons and Atomic Energy, who had responsibility for knowing the whereabouts of every individual nuclear weapon in the world, including test devices and weapons under production. The Assistant had an enormous looseleaf notebook that had the reported location of every operational weapon in the world. No weapons were listed in Japan. No ship carrying weapons was listed as stationed there. In fact there was no indication in the book that a situation such as I described existed.

When Nitze's investigator pressed the point, the Special Assistant, whose job gave him very high status and who was a direct representative of the Secretary of Defense, picked up the phone and called his counterpart in the Navy to check on it. He was told there was no such situation, my story had no basis.

However, in pursuing the name I had supplied for the LST, Nitze's man soon discovered that the San Joaquin County was listed in Navy records as home-ported in Okinawa. And by further interviews he discovered that it was being carried that way in Navy reporting precisely as a cover to deceive the Special Assistant and his boss about the fact that it was permanently based in Okinawa, except for a few months every three years when it was in Okinawa



for repairs and overhaul. By coincidence, at the very time of this investigation it was back in Okinawa undergoing its triennial refitting, which would take another month or so.

Deceiving the Secretary of Defense on the whereabouts of a nuclear weapon was the highest imaginable offense within the bureaucracy. No one could miss that, reading this report. It was not within the rules of the bureaucratic game, in the remotest sense. But there was an obvious bureaucratic solution. All that had to be done was to keep the LST in Okinawa, where it was officially home-ported and where it happened to be at the moment. Nitze's staff recommended that he take this up immediately with McNamara. A directive had been drafted for him to give to McNamara to send to the Chief of Naval Operations, ordering the ship not to return to Japan. McNamara had signed and sent it to the CNO.

Harry Rowen told me what happened. Nitze told him that soon after the directive went out from McNamara, Nitze happened to be at a meeting in McNamara's office on another matter along with Admiral Burke, the Chief of Naval Operations. At the end of the meeting Burke asked him to return with him to Burke's office, in a different part of the Pentagon. When they got to the office, Burke sat down at his desk and Nitze saw immediately that he had in front of him a "burn copy" (this was the predecessor to the xerox process, it was a somewhat fuzzy copy on tan, flimsy paper) of my "Top Secret--Eyes Only" memo, which was intended for Nitze alone and wasn't supposed to be copied. Nitze's subordinates in ISA were mostly military officers, and it was obvious that some commander or captain or rear admiral working for him had seen my memo, copied it and delivered it to Admiral Burke. He also had on the desk a copy of the ISA investigative report, along with McNamara's directive to him.

Burke started discussing my memo and the report, neither of which were supposed to have been sent out of ISA. He made no explanation about what he was doing with them, which surprised Nitze more than it might have later, after he'd had more experience inside the Pentagon.<sup>3</sup> "Burke was furious." He was red-haired and famously given to rages, but this one was in front of an Assistant Secretary of Defense, which was another surprise to Nitze. Burke made no attempt to deny the facts of the reports or to justify anything. The only thing he had to say, in a fury, was "What did Nitze think he was doing, as a civilian, interfering with the operations of ships of the U.S. Navy?"

The fact that this ship was in violation of one of our most important security treaties and was posing enormous diplomatic risks, that it was carrying nuclear weapons in violation of regulations on their whereabouts and in deliberate deception of the Secretary of Defense, that the Special Assistant to the Secretary had been lied to by the Navy, none of these was brought up by Burke nor was he willing to hear about. His position was that it was



absolutely unacceptable that the Secretary of Defense should presume to tell the Navy where to put its ships.

Harry got the impression that Nitze left the office very shaken by the experience, by Burke's willingness to confront him in this way, but determined to have the Navy brought into line. He himself was not in a clearcut command position with respect to Burke, except as he was accepted as a direct representative of the Secretary. So everything depended on McNamara's standing by his directive and backing Nitze up on this issue. Harry told me that Nitze went to McNamara and told him this was of the highest urgency and that he should order Burke to comply with his directive and with the treaty.

I asked Harry, "So what's happened?"

"McNamara decided to withdraw the directive. He backed off. With all the fights he's having with the Services he didn't want to add this one."

I asked, "Does McNamara know he was lied to by the Navy?"

Harry said, "Yes, that's what made him furious in the first place. It's what got him to send the directive." But faced with Nitze's account of Burke's own fury, McNamara had to pick his fights, which included a struggle over the number of nuclear-powered carriers.

No Secretary of Defense before McNamara had tried to exercise command authority over military operations. Before the 1958 Reorganization Act that put the Secretary of Defense in the chain of military command, no Secretary had even had such authority on paper. Their authority covered procurement, budget, personnel, administration, but not operational military matters. And since 1958 neither McElroy nor Gates had tried to exercise their new command authority over operations. McNamara was ready to do that, but he was being cautious. In this case, I could guess, he would face the likelihood that the Navy would leak the dispute to a friendly committee in Congress, in distorted fashion, and make him defend himself from the charge he was unduly entering into operations by ordering around individual ships.<sup>4</sup>

That is, he might have faced from some hostile committee chairman the question I got from the Vice President of RAND, Dick Goldstein, when I returned to California. There had been a meeting of the Air Force Advisory Board that controlled the RAND budget, on which General LeMay sat. Goldstein called me into his office and said, "Dan, this is hard to believe, but we have a charge here from General LeMay--he's been told by Admiral Burke--that you have been giving the Navy orders on how to operate a destroyer squadron. Is this possible?"



I said, "What?!" I couldn't deny that most of the things I was doing in Washington would look madly presumptuous to most military officers, but I felt pretty sure I hadn't done anything like that. It took a second or two to guess what it must be referring to. The mention of Burke was the tip-off. I told Goldstein the whole story and he passed it on. No one reprimanded me, though Burke had asked LeMay to have me fired from RAND.

So the San Joaquin County went back to Japan.

1. This ability to short-circuit bureaucratic channels of communication, to bypass intermediate levels or interagency walls that might have bottled up embarrassing but crucial information, was a little-recognized potential of a consulting organization like RAND that could have been seen as one of its most valuable functions. It came to be a specialty of mine. By the time I copied and gave the Pentagon Papers to a Senate Committee in 1969 and then to public through the press in 1971--having come to see these, on the basis of the Constitution, as having higher authority than the Executive in matters of war and peace--I was extending and repeating what I had been doing professionally for more than a decade, moving from lower to higher levels of authority information and warnings that had been wrongfully blocked, withheld or distorted at intermediate levels.

2. The National Security Archive has unearthed references to a flurry of memos stimulated by mine and by Stanley's investigation, and has asked to have them declassified, a request so far unsatisfied. These include: a memo to Mr. Williams from Ellsberg, 4\25\61, subject: Nuclear Weapons in Japanese Home Waters; memos between Timothy Stanley and General Dabney on this subject; memo to SecDef from Bundy, 5\4\61; memo to Admiral McCormick from Lang, 5\17\61, subject: Deployment of the San Joaquin County; memo to Secretary of the Navy from Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, 5\19\61; draft memo to Chief of Naval Operations, subject: Presence of Nuclear Weapons in Japan; memo for Nitze from Lang, 5\26\61, subject: crux of issue as to whether or not the deployment of the San Joaquin County is in violation of our commitments with Japan.

There are similar references to a later set of memos in June, 1966 about the San Joaquin County (also requested under FOIA by the National Security Archive) between McNamara, John McNaughton (Nitze's successor as Assistant Secretary of Defense for ISA), and the JCS, apparently stimulated by the impending visit of the Director of the Japan Defense Agency.



3. International Security Affairs was staffed largely with active military officers on loan from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. The same was true for the other agencies under Assistant Secretaries, like Systems Analysis or Manpower. In theory these officers, all men, were not representing their services but for the length of this duty had only one boss, the Assistant Secretary. But ultimately their promotions, their next duty assignment, their careers depended on their home service. Probably every piece of paper that crossed the desk of one of these officers that looked of possible relevance to his own service was copied or paraphrased for the information of that service. It could take a long time for a civilian employee or the Assistant Secretary to grasp this, if he ever did.

When Mort Halperin was Henry Kissinger's Deputy and then-Colonel Alexander Haig was Kissinger's aide in 1969, Mort once said to me, a propos of Kissinger's obsession with secrecy and his refusal to inform Mort about many of his dealings with the President, "I wonder if Henry is aware that there are many pieces of information that are known only to Nixon, Kissinger, and the Chief of Staff of the Army."

In the late fall of 1971, Henry became aware that virtually piece of paper that had crossed his desk or issued from his secretary's typewriter, including the most sensitive cables dealing with the secret negotiations with China and Vietnam or transcripts of his own telephone conversations with Nixon, had been copied or transmitted, instead of being burned, to Admiral Moorer, Chairman of the JCS by a Navy enlisted man, Yeoman Radford, who worked in his office and had accompanied him on trips. This had been done on the orders, or encouragement, of Radford's bosses, Navy admirals who worked alongside Haig under Kissinger.

[This was discovered by a White House investigation conducted by John Ehrlichman and David Young, who were simultaneously in charge of the White House "plumbers" who were assigned to investigate and "neutralize" me. They had just sent Hunt and Liddy and some Cubans to Los Angeles to burglarize the office of my former psychoanalyst, searching his files for information on me with which to blackmail me into silence about what I might know about Nixon's secret threats and plans in Vietnam. Kissinger feared I might have learned from some aide, who himself wasn't supposed to know it, some things which were known only to Nixon, Kissinger, and, it now appeared, Admiral Moorer and whoever he might have told.

Radford was transferred but not punished, since Nixon chose not to reprimand or replace Moorer. Rather, with this transgression hanging over the Chairman's head, Nixon felt he could count even more on his subservience to the President. That was important, because he and Kissinger had a "secret channel" to Moorer, sending information and directives to him that by-passed



Moorer's boss in the chain of military command, Secretary of Defense Laird. Laird disagreed with Nixon's policy in Vietnam and Nixon didn't trust him to carry it out with full force or to keep it secret, so he wanted to be able to give Moorer directions secretly from Laird. Nixon was having the FBI wiretap the phone conversations of Laird's assistant, General Pursley, along with the phonecalls of various of Kissinger's aides including Halperin.

When Hunt and Liddy, who had worked for Young and Egil Krogh under Ehrlichman, were arrested after the Watergate break-in, one reason that Nixon was so concerned to keep their silence about their earlier work as "plumbers" was that the investigative trail might uncover the Ehrlichman-Young discovery of Moorer's quasi-spying on the NSC. So what? Nixon feared that would lead to the exposure and loss of his "secret channel" to the JCS, by-passing Laird, which he had used extensively in 1971 to promote secret bombing of North Vietnam. The White House role in managing that secret escalation was especially sensitive since that bombing had led to the break-off by North Vietnam of the secret negotiations, turning instead to their offensive across the DMZ in 1972.

In describing the need to keep Hunt silent before the grand jury and thus the need to pay him off, Nixon always included, among the sensitive things that Hunt's testimony might otherwise lead to, the command link to Moorer that was secret from Secretary Laird. That was one of the "national security" secrets that had to be kept from the public, alongside the Fielding break-in and the attempted assault on me, at the price of bribing Hunt in obstruction of justice, new secrets that had to be kept at the risk of impeachment...

Are you getting the picture?

4. The next year during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when McNamara was asking pointed questions of Admiral Anderson, Burke's successor as Chief of Naval Operations, as to precisely how Navy ships would be implementing the blockade of Cuba, Anderson became so angry that he virtually ordered McNamara out of the Flag Plot command post. "Now, Mr. Secretary, if you will go back to your office, the Navy will run the blockade." McNamara, in turn, soon removed Anderson as CNO, but after Congressional pressure he was made Ambassador to Portugal.